

Lessons learned – planning and undertaking a Drivers of Change study

Over 20 DFID country offices have engaged with the Drivers of Change (DOC) approach, the majority by commissioning a study. Three-quarters of these studies have produced reports and in some cases a large number of sub-study reports. This note presents a synthesis of the lessons learned as a result of this work, and suggests ways in which new and on-going studies could be conducted for maximum benefit. For an update of DFID's work on Drivers of Change, see the DFID briefing *Using Drivers of Change to improve aid effectiveness*.¹

Timing

The studies provide a systematic way of gathering and sharing information as well as establishing contacts; they have proved most useful when they are undertaken:

- Well in advance of planning and programming exercises to allow findings to inform the process.
- When a significant proportion of the team are new, e.g. setting up a new office, or when the team changes. This allows information to be shared, assumptions to be addressed and has proved beneficial to team building.

Preparing to commission a study

Studies have been most effective when the country office takes time to define the purpose of the study, including how any documents or messages will be shared. This works best when:

- The scope of the study is tailored to fit available financial and time resources.
- The audience and potential audiences for the study are clearly defined, and a dissemination strategy is developed. This includes planning to handle awkward issues and unexpected reactions to the findings, and suggests preparing local interlocutors to receive the findings (see who to involve outside DFID).
- Country teams recognise the value of using the process and dissemination of the findings to stimulate debate. Dissemination is also in keeping with HMG's commitment to Freedom of Information, and in line with DFID and FCO Management Board endorsed principles for DOC.

¹ DFID briefing *Using Drivers of Change to improve aid effectiveness*, November 2005.

Who to involve in DFID

Drivers of Change knowledge has been valued most when:

- The Head of Office or Group engages positively at all stages in the study.
- Programme staff play a key role in leading the study in conjunction with appropriate advisory staff.
- A cross-section of country team members are involved at key points in the process. Forming a steering committee can help facilitate this.
- As many staff members as possible have an opportunity to contribute.
- Headquarters staff provide a challenge function.

Choosing the study team

With the exception of one country office, external consultants have conducted the studies. Country office staff indicate this limits the potential for difficult issues to undermine external relationships; particularly, but not exclusively, relationships with partner governments. Key issues to consider when putting together a team include:

- Selecting a team leader with knowledge and experience of this type of study, and one who is able to challenge assumptions. For the team leader role this has proved more important than their level of country knowledge.
- Ensuring a number of the team members have good country knowledge and a broad range of contacts, and that the team draws on local skills and knowledge.
- Choosing team members from a cross-section of disciplines. These may include political economy analysis, governance, social development, economics and relevant sectoral experience.
- Making provision in the budget for the hiring of local staff to handle logistics.
- And as more DOC work is undertaken in fragile states, calculating the potential risks to locally recruited team members. If these outweigh the benefits, seek alternative ways of engaging them (see who to involve from outside DFID).

Who to involve from outside DFID

Involving others early in the process can help maximise the benefits and minimise the risk of controversy. Broadening and deepening involvement has also provided opportunities to include the contribution of others; have others act as ambassadors for the process and its findings; and to encourage wider uptake and use of the findings. Involve:

- Other government departments including the FCO at the outset to gain their support; benefit from their knowledge and contacts; and foster joint ownership.
- Other donors, including like-minded donors who may be willing to help disseminate findings and/or messages.
- A reference panel of individuals able to provide validation of the findings as well as point out how to handle potential political sensitivities.

The document/s

The format and contents of the documents produced by DOC studies vary. Readers find them most accessible when they:

- Include a tightly written executive summary, supported by summary charts, tables and maps as appropriate.
- Include a section challenging conventional wisdom or assumptions.
- Provide details of who has been interviewed. Although if this could compromise individuals their names should be kept separate.

Disseminating the findings

Increasingly country offices have seen the benefits of sharing DOC findings beyond the immediate team. Dissemination has included:

- Production of tailored versions of the report for different audiences.
- Translating documents to stimulate wider debate.
- Careful sequencing of the release of findings, before or after specific political events depending on the required outcome.

Things to try

A number of gaps are suggested by the work to date, and indicate studies would benefit from:

- Focusing in depth on a sector in which DFID is operating.
- Ensuring TORs direct DOC team members to investigate potential levers of change, and that teams are configured to do this.
- Including DOC team members with operational experience, particularly where programming recommendations are required.
- Greater focus on non-traditional channels and potential partners to provide greater detail about for example the private sector and the media.
- Peer review by other DFID offices to facilitate lesson learning and joint problem solving.
- Greater emphasis on regional or global factors, including those which external governments play a role in.

Where lessons are not yet clear

A number of issues remain unresolved, these include whether to:

- Undertake studies jointly with other donors. Pros include harmonisation principles and limiting the potential for donor duplication and attendant demands on partner country resources. Cons include differing purposes for undertaking the studies, particularly where other donors may be unwilling or unable to share the findings. This suggests the need to clarify aspirations and expectations before proceeding.
- Undertake studies jointly with partner governments. Pros include alignment principles and potential for increased ownership of the issues by partners.

Cons include possible bias and suppression of findings. Again this suggests the need to clarify aspirations and expectations before proceeding.

- Publish the full main study report. Although it is clear that sharing the knowledge generated has multiple benefits, country offices are concerned that publishing the full study report immediately may have negative consequences. This suggests they should find other ways of sharing the findings and consider allowing the study team to publish the report independently. It also suggests that no one product can suit all needs.

Using DOC findings

In addition to refining DOC studies, DFID's Policy Division Effective States team is considering how best to update and disseminate this information regularly and efficiently; and is investigating how to foster national expertise to do this. The team is also seeking support from other divisions to promote the regular use of DOC findings, however generated, by country offices and headquarters alike to inform programming and policy making.

Comments and further information

1. If you would like to provide comments or discuss this note, please contact Ann Freckleton on a-freckleton@dfid.gov.uk.
2. Drivers of Change documents can be found at: http://www.grc-exchange.org/g_themes/politicalsystems_drivers.html or by contacting Aislin Baker on a-baker@dfid.gov.uk.

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